

S E C R E T

23 August 1968

LATIN AMERICAN REACTION TO THE CZECHOSLOVAKIA CRISIS

1. Government Reaction

Latin American governments except Cuba have been unanimous in their condemnation of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Typical of official comment is that of Chile's President Frei, who has stated that the invasion is "a flagrant violation of the determination of peoples," and "threatens world peace and the very existence of defenseless small countries." Frei's Christian Democratic Party (PDC) issued a statement condemning the invasion as a violation of the peaceful coexistence principles "so many times proclaimed by the Soviet Union." PDC presidential aspirant Radomiro Tomic said that "Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia is a brutal reaffirmation of the claimed 'strategic security zones' of the great powers which smother the right of smaller peoples to choose the regime they prefer."

The Argentine foreign minister declared that "the Argentine Government is indignant at the armed intervention in Czechoslovakia by the USSR and other members of the Warsaw Pact, and regrets and energetically condemns the deed which constitutes a violation of sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention." President Balaguer of the Dominican Republic has termed the occupation of Czechoslovakia "very deplorable," and said that all the Dominican people "condemn the intervention." Panama's President Robles said he was shocked and concerned over the situation, and hoped that the US and other western powers would not seek recourse only within the United Nations. He felt that more direct and positive action was necessary. Prime Minister Burnham of Guyana called the invasion "morally and legally indefensible," and a "mockery of the posturing by large nations about the rights of small nations to decide their own destinies and to be free from outside interference." Brazilian President

S E C R E T

S E C R E T

Costa e Silva said that the "invasion and occupation of its territories by forces of socialist countries led by the Soviet Union constitute a grave affront to the freedom and sovereignty of the Czech people and harms the basic norms of behavior stated in the United Nations Charter." He went on to say that the "Brazilian Government deploras and condemns this blow committed against Czechoslovakia...and makes a vehement appeal that interventionist activities cease...."

Venezuelan officials have been particularly critical of Soviet actions. An important member of the government said that "the Soviets have demonstrated that they are the champion imperialists of the contemporary world." The foreign minister has hinted that the recent developments could affect Venezuela's attitude toward the desirability of renewing relations with the Soviet Union and other countries. He also said that his government will review its decision to reestablish relations with Czechoslovakia. For the past several months Venezuela has been actively seeking to reestablish economic and political ties with Russia and bloc countries.

The congress of Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Venezuela have unanimously passed resolutions condemning the invasion of Czechoslovakia. In Costa Rica, the legislative assembly requested the government to break diplomatic relations with Poland, the only bloc country with whom it has relations.

There has been no official comment out of Cuba, but Fidel Castro is scheduled to address the nation on the crisis the night of 23 August. (See Annex for other Cuban reaction).

2. Communist Party and Leftist Reaction

The Communist parties and extreme left have reacted along predictable lines. The Chilean Communist Party, which is probably the most important of the Latin American Communist Parties, has insisted that the Soviet move was "necessary to prevent a revival of capitalism," and that "reactionary forces cannot be permitted to reconquer for capitalism Czechoslovakia or any other socialist country." The Venezuelan Communist Party, through its electoral front, issued an "energetic and

S E C R E T

-2-

S E C R E T

categorical" denial that the "glorious Soviet Army" was guilty of an invasion of Czechoslovakia, attributing such reports to "imperialist news agencies." El Popular, the organ of the orthodox Uruguayan Communist Party, claimed that the Soviet invasion was in "defense of Czechoslovakia, socialism, and peace." One leader commented that the Warsaw Pact countries "correctly invaded to counter German revanchism encouraged by the United States." The Costa Rican Communist Party said the Soviet action was justified because of a danger of invasion by the United States and West Germany.

The more extremist, anti-Moscow parties have criticized the Soviet Union. The Chilean Popular Socialist Party declared that no country has the right to mix in the internal affairs of other countries, and that the Soviet action "will only strengthen the reactionary cause around the world." A spokesman for a Chilean pro-Castro group stated that there is "absolutely no justification for the Soviet move, and the alleged Czech call for help is pure pretext."

The non-communist left has also criticized the Soviet invasion. In Venezuela, many politicians view the crisis as having a damaging effect on the chances of left-of-center candidates in the December national elections. Guyana's pro-Communist leader Cheddi Jagan had no comment, saying that the matter was very important and that he had to discuss the situation with his party colleagues before making a statement.

3. Public Reaction

Virtually every non-Communist newspaper in Latin America has condemned the Soviet action. Editorial opinion has been uniformly critical, although a few cannot resist needling the United States on Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. For two days, Chileans have been demonstrating in front of the Soviet Embassy in Santiago. There was a brief demonstration in front of the Soviet Embassy in Buenos Aires on 21 August. According to press reports, more than 200 Czechs working in Cuba held a rally in downtown Havana on 22 August. The Czech ambassador

S E C R E T

-3-

S E C R E T

to Cuba, Jaroslav Bscolka, led the demonstrators in support for Dubcek and cries of "Russians go home from Czechoslovakia" were heard. Copies of a declaration signed by the demonstrators demanding the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops were sent to all foreign ministries in Havana asking support through diplomatic channels. Castro was also asked for his support.

S E C R E T

-4-